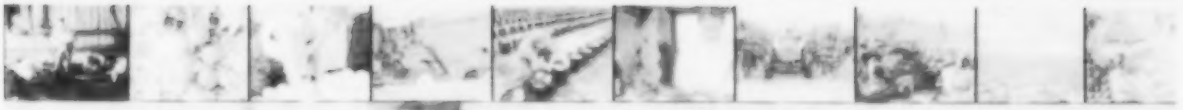

Growing TOGETHER

THE RURAL - URBAN CONNECTION

Fall 2000, Vol 1, No.2

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

BC's Local Governments

Planning for agriculture's sustainable future

Do your agriculture have a place in local government planning process? Many rural and urban municipalities and regional districts are answering this question with an emphatic "yes".

This, however, has not always been the case. Historically, municipalities have focused much of their planning and policy efforts on a wide range of urban development challenges. Farming, ranching and the agricultural land base have often been a low priority on public agendas at the local level. But by the 1990's several municipalities were beginning to place increasing emphasis on short rural and agricultural areas.

> "As with many other municipalities in urban regions, the official community plans did not consider rural issues in a comprehensive manner."
>
> *Paul Crawford, Senior Planner, Township of Langley*

With the adoption in 1991 of the Langley Rural Plan, for the first time a municipal council focused as much planning attention on its rural areas, which are predominantly within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), as to its urban neighborhoods.

Several other local government planning processes and studies have also directed at the rural and farming areas of the province to ensure agriculture's continued place in their communities. This momentum, which started in the early 1990's, is continuing. Following is a summary of several notable local government initiatives completed or started during the last year.

A strong local agriculture industry provides many benefits: access to local produce; a strong, diverse economy; and sustainable communities.

Agriculture Plans, Studies and Strategies completed during the 1990's

Delta Agriculture Study	1992
Langley Rural Plan	1993
Delta Rural Land Use Study	1993
Agriculture Strategy for the Saanich Peninsula	1997
Vision Maple Ridge Rural Plan	1997
Kelowna Agriculture Plan	1998

Chilliwack Agricultural Strategy

Chilliwack has made a major commitment to economic development in their community by investing $1 million in the Chilliwack Economic Partnership Corporation (CEPCO), over the last five years. Recognizing the importance of agriculture to the region, CEPCO established the Chilliwack Agricultural Committee as a subsidiary organization. The result was twofold: the development of the Agricultural Sector Strategy for the District of Chilliwack. The strategy explored the strengths, constraints and opportunities for Chilliwack's agricultural sector. It outlined a series of goals and seven key strategies and actions. Looking ahead, the Strategy predicts that Chilliwack's strengths, along with its ever growth in agriculture, although more difficulties and lead to significant opportunities. Farmers continue to view Chilliwack as an excellent place to farm.

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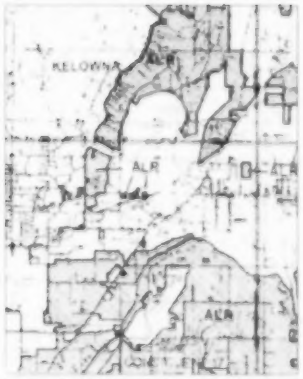

Kelowna is an example of just one of many municipalities with very lengthy farm edges. As the crow flies, the City of Kelowna is about 13 kilometres wide and 26 kilometres north - south. Yet its ALR "coastline," just within the City, is over 260 kilometres in length the approximate distance from Vancouver to Merritt.

Special Management Areas

Developing 'edge' planning guidelines

Local governments are continually faced with land use competition issues. Finding the right balance between different needs and interests competing for a limited land base isn't easy. In an ideal world, planning processes would simply be put in place to prevent incompatible land uses from locating next to each other. However, the likelihood of meeting this objective is low. This is particularly the case in B.C. where geographic constraints have resulted in many different uses competing for a very limited land base.

One area that demands careful consideration in achieving compatibility is along farm edges. Historically, land use patterns, coupled with a rapidly growing urban population, have created lengthy edges between agricultural and other land uses in many municipalities. For municipalities in the City of Kelowna, for example, with its ALR which is rural in character, land is surrounded by urban development on three sides. Likewise, farms in and near the Fraser Valley are often surrounded by urban development on two sides. Issues that can arise from these "edge" conditions include: trespass, theft and damage to crops and equipment; harassment of livestock; and flooding from urban storm water run-off onto farmland. Other issues are less tangible, but can be just as serious to farmers and ranchers.

If these issues are not handled effectively along both sides of the fence, tensions can result between neighbours, and farming can become increasingly difficult. To help strengthen relations between neighbours and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) is currently engaged in a project to develop guidelines and standards that can be applied within Special Management Areas (SMAs). These areas include urban - farm edges, clusters of non-farm uses in the ALR such as rural residential nodes, and areas of environmental sensitivity. The goal of the project is to develop guidelines and standards that will help to minimize potential conflicts and other problems that may arise between farmers and their neighbours and to the same time allow farming to remain economically viable.

Because conflicts can impact both sides of the edge, it is important that solutions to urban - rural conflict be based on the principle of shared responsibility. This type of SMA guidelines and standards development will address land use buffering and siting, as both the farm and non-farm sides of the interface. In addition, farm management standards will also be developed to guide farming practices within SMAs.

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BC's Local Governments

Planning for Agriculture's Sustainable Future

Surrey Agricultural Plan

The City of Surrey's population is large and growing rapidly. Despite being B.C.'s second largest municipality, Surrey is much more than just an urban community and in recent years Council has taken several steps to ensure the long term sustainability of its farm sector. In 1990, Council appointed an Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) to provide advice on day to day land use issues and longer range planning questions.

> *Between 1991 and 1996, Surrey's population increase was larger than the combined population increase of the Provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.*

In 1998 the Official Community Plan was updated and included supportive agricultural policies with a commitment to protect and enhance farming. To help meet this commitment, Surrey got in place the first development permit area for the protection of farming in BC. The plan also directed that a farm community plan be developed.

With the direct involvement of the AAC, what emerged was the Surrey Agricultural Plan adopted in 1999. The Plan provides a comprehensive framework and implementation strategy for addressing agricultural issues, resolving rural-urban conflicts and helping to ensure the long term viability of the agricultural sector.

District of Pitt Meadows

By the end of 1999, the District of Pitt Meadows Council received a report prepared under the guidance of the Agricultural Plan Steering Committee – *The Future of Agriculture: The District of Pitt Meadows*. The decision to undertake an agricultural area plan emerged as part of an updated Official Community Plan. Within the agricultural plan key issues were identified and Council was provided with a comprehensive list of recommendations. The Plan's vision statement included a commitment to a viable and progressive agriculture industry, agreeing to optimize the use of all agricultural lands. A strategy for the long term viability of Pitt Meadows farm sector included a recommendation for an Agricultural Advisory Committee – a recommendation that Council is currently pursuing.

Richmond Agricultural Viability Strategy

The City of Richmond is another municipality with a large and rapidly growing urban population that contains a significant agricultural base to the Lower Mainland. The 1999 update of the Richmond OCP established a policy framework for the Land Reserve Commission (LRC) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) to identify and implement policies and programs aimed at supporting farming viability. To meet this objective, the City and local farmers' interests united forces to develop the Agricultural Viability Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy is not to protect [illegible] agricultural economy and ALR land should be farmed. [illegible] can be better farmed and managed. During the last year [illegible] a set of recommendations were completed by the City – an Agriculture Issues Report which gathered [illegible] and public opinion [illegible] and a comprehensive [illegible] Agriculture [illegible] Public Participation [illegible] the project [illegible] conference. Besides [illegible] a number of [illegible] being considered [illegible] by [illegible] MAFF and Agriculture Canada are also providing assistance.

> *"The premise behind the Richmond Agriculture Viability Strategy is: in the past we have managed the ALR for protection of farmland; we must now move toward managing it for the viability of farming."*
>
> *Terry Crowe, Manager, Land Use Department, City of Richmond.*

North Cowichan Strategic Agriculture Plan

Early in 2000 the District of North Cowichan initiated a strategic agricultural planning process. The work is being guided by an Agriculture Plan Advisory Committee made up of District farmers, representatives for the Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures, a District Councillor and municipal, MAFF and LRC staff. The objectives of the Plan are to report on the current status of the agricultural industry and identify community opportunities and solutions to the challenges facing the industry. The Plan will recommend future actions, identify means to promote agriculture in the District and establish a monitoring process.

Involving the farm community and the general public in the planning process has also been identified as a key part of the process. "With the growth of agriculture in our area, it is essential that we involve local citizens, representatives in our planning process," comments Chris Hall, Director of Planning, North Cowichan. "Our agricultural plan will bring some focus to what is a very important part of our local economy."

Greater Vancouver / Fraser Valley Regional Districts

The Agricultural Advisory Committee of the Greater Vancouver Regional District is developing an Economic Strategy for Agriculture in the Lower Mainland. Working with the Fraser Valley Regional District, the GVRD has obtained funding and should have this significant project completed before January 2002. A consultant – or GVRD's Agricultural Advisory Committee – has been established to provide a viable task overview, including assistance from MAFF and the LRC. The project objectives will include an understanding of the historic and present economic importance of agriculture in the area. The report will produce a long range and short range strategy for increasing the economic viability of the agricultural sector in the Lower Mainland.

Creston Valley OCP Update

The Regional District of Central Kootenay is currently in the process of updating the OCP for the Creston Valley area. To assist this process, MAFF, LRC and Regional District staff have met to consider how to enhance and use information in the Valley. It is hoped that an improved understanding of land uses and farming systems in the Valley will assist in the process of determining issues that can be addressed within the Plan or other subsequent actions. Issues that the Creston Valley normally generates during OCPs or all grow large amongst us Central Kootenay, the MAFF and LRC are pleased to be able to work with the Regional District on this important project.

In the case of all of the locally driven agricultural planning processes that have emerged over the last number of years, MAFF, LRC and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have played an active role in providing support in a variety of ways, and will continue to do so. An important lesson has also emerged. Each of these planning processes have been influenced by the decisions of councils and boards to directly involve members of their agriculture communities in the process.

It is important that the efforts of local governments to create agriculture's continued place in their communities are recognized. None of these planning processes would have been initiated without the vision and commitment of local councils, regional boards and their staffs.

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Surrey Agricultural Advisory Committee at work.

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Special Management Areas

Developing 'edge' planning guidelines

Standards that address farming activities can be implemented through a farm bylaw. Guidelines that address urban / non farming activities can be best implemented through zoning bylaw provisions and policies associated with development permit areas for the protection of farming within official community plans. In addition, care taken at the time of subdivision through the application of buffering techniques and sensitive subdivision design is also important. Together, special management area guidelines and other edge planning tools should work as a complementary package applied in a manner that best meets local circumstances. As a result, an important part of this work program will involve consultation with local governments and the agriculture industry.

The final guidelines and standards are intended to be easily enforceable and cost effective, yet strict enough to address the issues that generate concerns. They should provide the support that local governments need to address urban-rural compatibility issues and add stability to the farming and non-farming sectors. The stability that is achieved through this edge planning process will ultimately help to secure agriculture as a key part of each community's economy and social fabric and enhance liveability for everyone.

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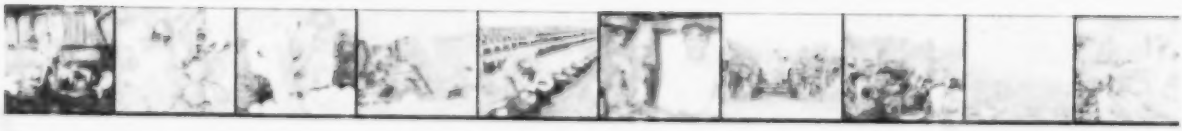


Growing Small

Interest in small scale & small lot farms on the rise

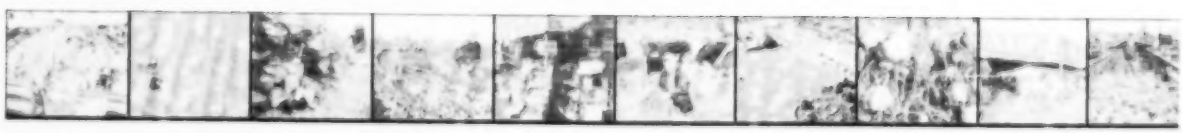
> *There has been an increase of 3,000 new small farms in B.C. between 1991 and 1996.*

> *"As a small lot farm, a good target is $10,000 gross per acre. If you can do that in a 3 month season you're doing well."*
> *Sylvia Leiden, Regatta Gardens, Coombs*

Planning for Agriculture

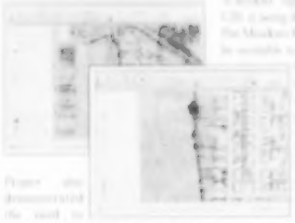
Funding & support available to local governments

> *"It is absolutely critical for local governments to be involved in planning for agriculture in their area. To that end, the B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation is prepared to help in funding planning initiatives at a local level."*
> *Gary Kenwood, Chair, B.C. Investment Agriculture Foundation*



An Agriculture GIS

The Pitt Meadows pilot project



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Surrey Takes Lead in Flood Control

The Serpentine Nicomekl flood control project

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Agriculture Overviews

A window on local agriculture

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